

Attachment (relationship)

An enduring emotional connection between a caregiver and an infant/young child. Attachment is characterized by the child's tendency, when under stress, to seek contact, comfort and proximity to a specific individual ("attachment figure") who is perceived to be bigger, stronger, wiser, and more competent. If that person is available to the child for comfort or protection, s/he will be preferred over any other individual. Conditions which typically activate children's behavior for seeking comfort and security are fatigue, illness, fear, and other experiences of vulnerability. Infants are not born attached to anyone and early on respond to the various people they encounter in very similar (though not identical) ways. Over the course of the first year of life however, infants become increasingly selective about whom they regard as competent to protect and comfort them. The emergence of a discriminate attachment figure, an attachment to a specific other, typically occurs in the 7-9 month period of development, cross-culturally. Given the opportunity, infants typically form attachments to more than one person.